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Written statement* submitted by the Child Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is hereby circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[24 February 2018]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Children in Syria

Entering its sixth year of conflict in early 2017, the civil war in the Syrian Arab Republic has continued to rage on in its path of destruction. By the end of 2017, 5.3 million children were in need of humanitarian assistance, 6.1 million people had been forced to relocate, and 5.5 million had fled the country as refugees since the beginning of the war. In this last year alone, there have been numerous confirmed attacks on education and health care facilities, resulting in hundreds of casualties, the majority of which have included civilian women and children. Though this violent situation has slowly begun to improve, more needs to be done in the coming year to prevent the breakdown of ceasefire agreements, to lift the remaining roadblocks preventing maximum humanitarian assistance, and to protect the well-being of children in areas of armed conflict.

One of the most central focuses of humanitarian organizations involved in bringing aid to Syria, health care and the transmission of medical supplies, has played a central role in the efforts of organizations like UNICEF in the last year. Due to the widespread distribution of vaccines, especially for young children, there luckily have been no significant disease outbreaks or confirmed cases of waterborne illnesses during the 2017 year. A huge accomplishment and evidence of continued hard work, this success shows serious improvement in health aid over the last few years. Unfortunately, water access and sanitation has been an issue in recent times, but continuing aid efforts have assisted the situation. In the beginning of last year, disrupted access to water supplies in Damascus quickly led to shortages in the area, but luckily this issue was quickly addressed with the rehabilitation of a main water spring that helped to benefit 490,000 people in the city. Additional infrastructure updates and interventions have helped to provide continued access to safe drinking water, and many of these efforts are expected to continue into the new year. Lastly, health education for caregivers, new mothers, and women of child-bearing age has been of high importance in this region. At both health centers and mobile locations, health and nutrition professionals have worked hard to teach methods for preventing severe malnutrition in young children. Overall, humanitarian efforts in the area of health have seen much growth in the last year which has allowed for a meaningful impact to be made on issues that have caused significant and wide-spread problems in the past. In the coming year, this area could likely benefit from a continued focus on health education and wide distribution of vaccines as a way of maintaining the progress that has been made in recent months.

Important to the future of Syria post-civil war, education is one of the most impactful areas that could use more attention from humanitarian organizations in the coming year. Suffering from the loss of over 150,000 teachers since the beginning of the crisis, the education system in Syria has faced serious setbacks that have left significant gaps. This has severely affected the overall functionality of the system itself. Putting aside obvious threats to the physical locations where learning takes place, one of the biggest barriers to adequately reaching the largest number of students has been the lack of availability of capable and well-trained teachers. The violence that has taken place over the last six years has not only prevented consistency in school attendance, but has also harmed countless school-age students psychologically in such a way that additional support is needed in the learning environment in this area. Efforts to overcome these shortcomings of the education system have been made, and in some cases, have successfully provided students with textbooks and other learning materials through programs like the Back to Learning Campaign, which is no small feat. In this next year, a larger focus should be placed on training teachers in the areas that have the most room for improvement, including psychosocial support. While the conflict continues, it is important to recognize the role that the next generation will likely need to play in rebuilding Syria both physically and politically.

Among the most well-known issues with widely-dispersed affects that this conflict has caused, physical displacement and high numbers of refugees have been the most difficult to manage. Countries bordering Syria have taken in a disproportional number of refugees in relation to non-border countries. But recently, these neighbors have demonstrated a concerted effort to curb their intake in a variety of cruel and unlawful ways. One especially violent example is the fatal shooting of a three year-old child in September of this year during a Syrian family's attempt to cross the Turkish border. Though there is recognition that the burden these countries are taking on is incredibly high, reported responses to this issue have revealed unnecessarily cruel treatment of Syrian refugees. This incident and other facts, like in Jordan alone over 400 refugees were deported by authorities in the first five months of 2017, with an additional 500 choosing to leave on their own for unclear reasons, show that additional attention is still needed for those affected by the civil-

war who have been forced to relocate. The movement from safer areas back to unsafe conditions shows an issue with the management of refugees in other countries. Over the course of the next year, it is important that humanitarian organizations focus additional effort on these displaced people who have not received the attention they deserve from their host countries. There is significant room for improvement in this area, and the best way to approach this is through open communication with Syria's neighbors on a more global scale. In this way, a more effective approach to solving issues relating to the treatment and overall care of refugees can be agreed upon by each party.

Human rights violations and violent attacks have created unavoidable issues for residents of Syria, as well as relief workers attempting to get supplies and volunteers on the ground. Seeming to increase in frequency and degree of damage done, airstrikes carried out by most all parties involved in the conflict have continued to have dramatic consequences for the civilian population. Two specific occasions of such strikes in late March, one of which took place at a school which housed displaced individuals and families, killed over 84 individuals, including 30 children. Additionally, during efforts to recapture Aleppo, there were several reports of helicopters dropping chlorine which demonstrates an unsafe and unnecessary use of chemical weapons. Claims like this and others have shown the level of carelessness adopted by many involved parties, including the United States and the Syrian government. With numerous confirmed attacks including 26 on educational facilities and 107 attacks affecting health facilities and their workers, it is clear that the biggest threat to children in this situation is the unknown. Families who are continually caught in these unwarranted military attacks and other forms of mass violence have developed unhealthy methods of coping with the violence which has in-turn caused other problems. In the last year there has been an increase in child labor, child marriage,

and separation of families. Outside of these threats faced within the family environment, children are also confronted with forced recruitment from violent extremest groups. Out of 300 verified cases of child recruitment, 18% involve individuals under the age of fifteen. Overall, the issue of violence within the country is one that most widely affects civilians, but there is little that seems to be done about it. While humanitarian organizations may not be able to directly affect these situations, it is important that they continue to remain involved with talks of ceasefire at a higher administrative level in order to better represent the individuals who's struggles they understand better than most.

Many of the setbacks that have taken place over the last year have occurred due to a lack of accessibility, administrative obstacles, and a failure of the warring parties to reach a sustainable agreement. First, while some areas of the country, such as Aleppo, have experienced an increase in accessibility for humanitarian groups, simultaneously, other areas have begun to create greater concern. With over 2.9 million Syrian people in what are considered to be hard to reach places, aid has not been as widely accessible as many groups would hope. Though this number is down 1.9 million from last year, there is still much improvement needed. Groups like Hay'et Tahrir at-Sham (HTS) have contributed significantly to this lack of accessibility because of their direct interference in the delivery of humanitarian aid. While many successful efforts have been made in the last year to prevent these sorts of issues through diplomatic channels, not enough has been done. In order to best assist the people of Syria, it is vitally important that agreements on ceasefires and de-escalation zones are continually pursued in such a way that all parties are forced to uphold their promises. The continuous break-down of such agreements has plagued this conflict for far too long and it is time for solid, binding terms to be put in place.

Overall, the past year has brought notable success for humanitarian organizations involved in assisting those most affected by the Syrian conflict. Improvements shown, especially in the area of health care, bring hope for the future if similar efforts can be demonstrated in the development of better education and support for refugees residing in neighboring countries. In all, only time will tell how much longer this violent war will rage on, but hopefully a newly reinvigorated focus on education and the welfare of children will provide citizens of the Syrian Arab Republic with the resources they need to rebuild once a settlement can be reached.